

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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THE THIRD DRINK from my pint bottle made him curious. He indicated the cardboard box between us on the car seat. "Anything special in the box?"

"My arm," I said.

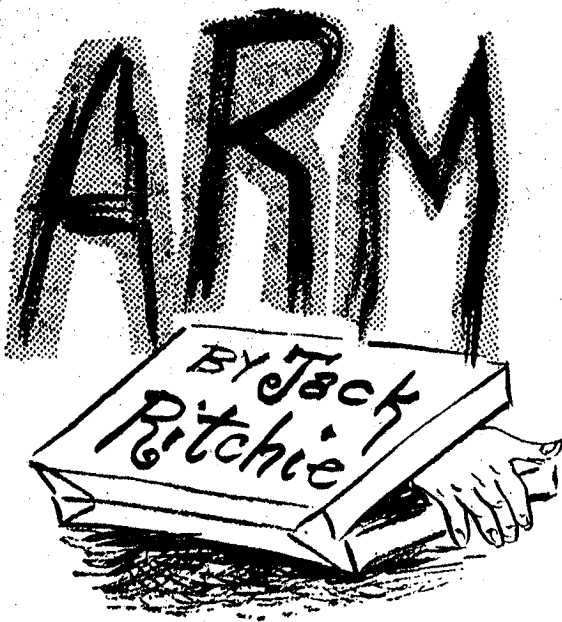
A sharp knife and a hacksaw were also wrapped inside.

He glanced at the sleeve pinned

half-way up the right arm of my suitcoat and then back at the box. "You going to bury it?"

"I'll see that it gets buried."

He chuckled. "Sure. It's not like with appendixes or gallstones. You can't keep it in a jar and look at it every once in a while. How did it happen?"



I guided the car around a curve with my left hand. "Automobile accident. I was going too fast on a strange road and missed a curve."

"Did they cut it off below the elbow or above?"

"Below."

"That's good. I mean, they'll be able to do something for you as long as you got the joint." He watched me take another curve. "Are you allowed to drive?"

"I didn't ask anybody."

"Well, automatic transmission helps." He tilted the bottle and

then wiped his mouth. "It's pretty rough when something like that happens. But it's not the end of the world. People adjust."

"That's right."

He extended the pint. "Have a drink. It's your bottle."

"Not right now. I'd have to stop the car to handle the bottle."

But I wasn't going to drink from that bottle now or later. There were two dozen sleeping pills dissolved in the whiskey.

"I guess you'll be getting an artificial arm? When you're wearing gloves nobody could tell the difference. When did it happen?"

"Eight days ago."

That surprised him. "They let you out of the hospital that soon?"

"I wanted out."

Yes, I had wanted out. The police had come to see me for their accident report. I'd had some work done on my face in Chicago a month ago and they hadn't recognized me. But I didn't want to lie there and keep counting on that. They might start thinking things over and remember something familiar.

Many and various are the dire prophecies concerning lost limbs rising up to rejoin the original bodies, on the Day of Judgment. This one did not wait for Judgment Day.

THE TRAVELING ARM

I passed a slow-moving truck. Five miles more and then I would turn into the dirt road and stop at the ravine. I'd been over this road a dozen times until I found the right spot—a place where there were no people, a place where there was no traffic.

He yawned. "My name's Witten. Joe Witten."

"Bragg," I said. "Sam." I wondered if he would recognize my real name. But maybe Sam Tyson meant nothing to him.

"What's your line, Sam?"

"Insurance." That was as good an answer as any.

"I suppose you travel a lot?"

"That's right."

Yes, I traveled a lot. Chicago. St. Louis. The Twin cities. But I did most of my work in the smaller places. There was the fourteen thousand from the Savings and Loan in that town just south of Minneapolis. I couldn't even remember the name of the place now. I didn't know the name of the clerk there either. But I remembered that I had made him die.

How much did I have in the safe deposit box in Kansas City now? Two hundred grand? Something like that.

Time to quit.

If you didn't quit, they'd get you sooner or later.

The police knew who they were looking for. There were enough witnesses scattered throughout the Mid-West to agree on my picture in the mug file.

The police would keep looking for me until they found me. They wouldn't stop.

Unless they thought I was dead.

Joe rubbed his eyes tiredly. "Thanks for picking me up."

"No trouble."

I'd waited in the crossroads restaurant and had coffee. Two cups, three, four, while I watched.

The corner was a good place for hitchhikers and I'd let half a dozen try their luck and get picked up by somebody else. I was looking for the right man.

I glanced at Joe. My height, my body size, my weight. He would do.

Joe yawned again. "Getting sleepy."

"Why not take a nap?"

"Might give it a try at that." He leaned back and closed his eyes.

After the doctor had told me the arm had to come off, he'd gotten to the next point. "What would you like us to do with the arm? In some cases, the patient likes to give it a burial himself. Otherwise we . . . dispose of it."

"Throw it in the furnace," I'd snapped.

But the idea came to me just as

he'd put his hand on the doorknob to leave the room.

"Doc," I said. "I changed my mind. Put the arm on ice. No embalming. I'll take it with me when I leave."

Joe was asleep now and breathing gently.

After another mile I slowed the car and turned into the dirt road. A minute later I brought the car to a stop on a slight downhill slope and pulled the emergency brake.

I put my box on the side of the road and removed a two-gallon gasoline can from the trunk of the car. Then I put the car into neutral, turned the wheel to the right slightly, and released the emergency brake.

A little push got the car rolling. It picked up speed, rolled onto the shoulder of the road, and then bounded down the steep slope, turning over and over and crashing through the bushes and small trees. When it finally stopped, it rested on one side at the bottom of the ravine.

I put the box under my arm, picked up the gasoline can, and found the path I'd scouted the day before. I made my way slowly down to the car.

Joe wasn't dead, but he was unconscious and bleeding. His arms were lacerated by the sharp glass and one of his legs was twisted

in a sharp right angle. I used a rock to finish him off.

I opened the box and took out my severed arm. I used the knife to destroy the surgeon's neat cut and then placed the arm in a clear space near the car where it would not be touched even if a brush fire started.

Back at the car I went to work with the knife and the hacksaw again. It took a little time.

When that job was done, I put the gear shift back into Drive and ignition key to On. Then I poured gasoline on the body and the car.

I fixed a stub of candle inside the car where no breeze could bother the flame and lit it. I could have worked something with flashlight batteries and a timer, but they would leave traces. The candle would burn up with Joe and the car just as soon as the flame reached the gasoline-soaked upholstery, in one big blaze.

I climbed back up to the road with the empty gasoline can and the box. Now it held the knife and the hacksaw—and Joe's right arm.

The story of the crash would read simple. The car had gone off the road, down the ravine, and burst into flames. The body had burned beyond recognition, but the crash had severed the right arm and it had been thrown clear.

The fingerprints would show

that the driver of the car had been Sam Tyson.

I walked about three hundred yards before I hid the gasoline can behind some bushes on the opposite side of the road. I kept the box. I would bury that later far away from here.

At the main road I hitched a ride with a truck.

When I looked back a wisp of smoke was rising in the sky and getting blacker.

The knock at my hotel room door came three days later. When I opened it, two men stood in the hall and looked me over.

The taller one made the recognition. "Your face is a little different, Tyson, but it isn't hard to trace a man with one arm."

There were two of them and they had gotten to me when I was not ready. There was nothing to do but let them take me in.

The tall man did the talking for both of them. "We figured that you'd hitch a ride to the nearest town with a bus depot. The man

who sold you the ticket remembered your empty sleeve and the place where you were going. And when we got here, we just checked the hotels for a man with one arm."

He saw the question in my eyes and answered it.

"We found the arm all right. Just the way you planned for us to. And we took the prints and sent them on to Washington. When we got our answer, that should have been enough to convince us that Sam Tyson was dead."

"But what?"

"But we also got your description. It didn't match that of the body."

"The hell it didn't! He was my height, my weight. And he was burned."

"That's right. The whole outside of him. But in cases like this we always do a routine autopsy. When your description came from Washington, it mentioned that you had an appendectomy scar. The body we found in the car still had an appendix." He smiled. "And so we kept looking for Sam Tyson. A one-armed Sam Tyson."

